

MEMORANDUM

To: Ravalli County Employees
From: Board of Commissioners
Date: March 24, 2020
Subject: COVID-19 Update, health insurance and paid time off additions

Thank you for your cooperation during these uncertain and unprecedented times. Many changes have been made rapidly in both our personal and professional lives. In times like these, it becomes extremely apparent the important role our governmental agency plays in providing critical services and leadership to our community.

For those of you who don't know, Ravalli County does have an Incident Management team currently operating and addressing the Covid 19 situation. This team has been meeting morning and evening and consists of Public Health, Public Safety, Office of Emergency Management, Medical Professionals from the community, and a Public Information Officer. All press releases from the team can be viewed on the county's web site along with links to other resources like FAQs related to COVID-19.

We believe our offices and departments have done a remarkable job using ingenuity and compassion for our community to adjust the method of how we serve the public while following the guidance and directives from the CDC and local officials with the ultimate goal of keeping us all safe and healthy.

These items remain the same and are worth repeating for the safety of ourselves and the people around us:

- Stay home if you are sick.
- Avoid physical contact with people who are sick.
- Wash your hands often, using soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze or use the inside of your elbow. Throw used tissues in the trash and immediately wash your hands.
- Avoid handshakes and other types of physical contact and stay at least 6 feet apart.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces with common household disinfectants.
- Avoid large gatherings of more than 10 people.

Some Ravalli County Offices/Departments have significantly increased workloads in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As the pandemic unfolds, many employees will be absent from work for various reasons, including caring for their minor children during school and daycare closures, quarantine due to exposure, or illness. We ask management to conduct daily evaluations of our valuable employee resources during this emergency situation to determine if assistance can be provided in areas of greater need within the County Offices/Departments. Your support is greatly appreciated and is the basis of Ravalli County's ability to successfully carry out its responsibilities for the community.

Be a Good Co-Worker:

Stay home and call your health care provider if you feel sick with cough, fever, or difficulty breathing. Please don't share your illness with co-workers or the citizens we serve, even if you don't think it is related to COVID-19.

Sick and Vacation Leave:

Today, Governor Bullock granted local government the authority to modify vacation and sick leave policy in response to the emergency, to minimize the economic impact to our employees. Employees who have exhausted their leave time, sick or vacation, may accrue a negative balance for the duration of this emergency to be recovered in future months of employment with Ravalli County. (Elected Officials and Department Heads, please contact HR or the BCC if you have any questions about this.)

NEW PAID TIME OFF BENEFITS THROUGH THE FEDERAL H.R. 6201

H.R. 6201 was signed into law on March 18, 2020. 2 items contained in this law pertain to types of paid leave. Both of these paid leave provisions expire on December 31, 2020, but have different effective dates. There is also an exclusion for health care providers and emergency responders. There are still many details that are unclear and we are working on getting answers to those as quickly as possible. For any leave you need to take from work, please continue to follow your office/department's notification procedure.

The following information is what we understand at this point in time regarding the 2 new paid leave provisions in H.R. 6201:

➤ **EMERGENCY FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE EXPANSION ACT**

This provision is effective immediately and is an extension of the Family Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA). In addition to the current rules for FMLA, an additional benefit will apply for employees that have a need for leave to care for their own child under the age of 18 if the school or place of care has been closed, or the child care provider of such child is unavailable, due to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

An eligible employee is one who has been employed for at least 30 calendar days by the employer with respect to whom leave is requested. The basic leave provisions are:

- A total of 12 weeks can be taken for the purpose of childcare as stated above
 - The first 2 weeks are unpaid, unless the employee elects to use any of their accrued paid time off, such as vacation, personal leave, or sick leave during this timeframe.
 - The remaining 10 weeks are paid at two-thirds the employees regular rate of pay

➤ **EMERGENCY PAID SICK LEAVE ACT**

The second paid leave provision of H.R. 6201 is effective on April 2, 2020, and will be referred to as Emergency Paid Sick Leave. This is separate from the regular sick leave provisions of MCA Title 2, Chapter 18, Part 6.

All employees are eligible for emergency paid sick leave, regardless how long they have worked for Ravalli County and regardless how many hours they work per week.

There are 6 different reasons an employee can take emergency paid sick leave:

1. The employee is subject to a Federal, State, or local quarantine or isolation order related to COVID-19.
2. The employee has been advised by a health care provider to self-quarantine due to concerns related to COVID-19.
3. The employee is experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 and seeking a medical diagnosis.
4. The employee is caring for an individual who is subject to an order as described #1 or has been advised as described in #2.
5. The employee is caring for a son or daughter of such employee if the school or place of care has been closed, or the child care provider of such child is unavailable, due to COVID-19 precautions. The definition of a child is the same as the FMLA leave.
6. The employee is experiencing any other substantially similar condition specified by the Secretary of Health and Human Services in consultation with the Secretary of the Treasury and the Secretary of Labor.

Leave taken for reasons 1-3 are paid at the employee's regular rate of pay, and reasons 4-6 are paid at two-thirds of the employee's regular rate of pay.

The total amount of emergency paid sick leave hours an employee is entitled to is:

- For full time employees, 80 hours.
- For part time employees, a number of hours equal to the number of hours that such an employee works, on average, over a 2-week period.

An employee is not required to exhaust other leave accruals before using emergency paid sick leave for the reasons stated above in 1-6.

Again, thank you for your service during this difficult time. We will continue to provide you with updates as new information becomes available to us.

Please stay safe!